

ABSTRACT

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CONTEMPORARY AFROCENTRIC RELIGIOUS EXPRESSIONS OF THE PAN-
AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH AS COMPARED TO JOHN S.
MBITI'S INTERPRETATION OF AFRICAN RELIGION

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This study examined the similarities and differences between John S. Mbiti's analysis of African religion and the theology of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church (P.A.O.C.C.). The study sought to establish whether the similarities represent African retentions and conscious adaptations within the P.A.O.C.C.

Five aspects were considered in the analysis of African Religion and the P.A.O.C.C. They are: revelation, god, humanity, savior/messiah and church.

The researcher found that within the theology of the P.A.O.C.C. there exist significant African retentions and learned adaptations of African religion that parallel Mbiti's analysis of African religion. The P.A.O.C.C. consider themselves a theological institution with Afrocentric practices and tradition. The conclusions suggest that the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church is an institution of contemporary Afrocentric religious expression.

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AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH AS COMPARED TO JOHN S.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
------------------------	----

Chapter

1. Introduction	1
2. Mbiti's Analysis of African Traditional Religion	4
Revelation	
God	
Humanity	
Savior/Messiah	
Church	
3. Aspects of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church (P.A.O.C.C.) . .	22
Historical Overview	
Revelation	
God	
Humanity	
Savior/Messiah	
Church	
4. Comparison: Mbiti's African Religion vs. P.A.O.C.C.	52
Revelation	
God	
Humanity	
Savior/Messiah	

Church

5. Conclusion	60
Works Cited	65

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The thesis of this work is that the Shrines of the Black Madonna of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church (P.A.O.C.C.) contain deep roots in traditional African religion. It is the hope that this thesis can be validated by the following steps: 1. An analysis of the works of John S. Mbiti, especially his book, Traditional African Religion. This analysis will be centered upon five crucial religious doctrines, 1) Revelation (epistemology), 2) God, 3) Humanity (perfect humanity, fallen), 4) Savior/Messiah (who is s/he?, what does s/he do?), 5) and Church (community of saved, immortality). 2. A brief history of and examination of the P.A.O.C.C. utilizing the same categories. 3. A comparison of traditional African religion and that of the P.A.O.C.C. that will bring to the forefront both the similarities with and differences between these expressions of religion. 4. Conclusions and the implications for further research.

Although there are scholars such as Molefi K. Asante¹ and Timothy J. Johnson,² who have given general definitions of Afrocentricity and the

¹ Molefi Kete Asante, Afrocentricity, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1989). In this text Molefi K. Asante defines Afrocentricity as a whole and within the third chapter of the book he connects the definition to what qualities constitute a Afrocentric Church (Christian). Molefi Kete Asante is a professor and head of the African Studies Department at Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

² Timothy J. Johnson, "The Black As An Afrocentric Institution," The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center 17, (Fall 1989-Spring 1990) : 134-154. In this article he defines the Afrocentric Church by comparison with other predominately African American, Christian institutions. Johnson categorizes them as: the "Other Worldly Church," the "Social Club Church," and the "Social Service Church." Timothy J. Johnson is an instructor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

Afrocentric Church respectively, a more direct comparison between the Shrines of the Black Madonna and Mbiti's analysis of African traditional religion will be used to add to the precision of these definitions and further substantiate African retentions in the African American religious experience.

This thesis will discuss John S. Mbiti's analysis of traditional or autochthonous religion of the continent, Alkebu-lan, commonly known as Africa, and compare it to the theological expression of The Shrines of the Black Madonna of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church (P.A.O.C.C.). J. S. Mbiti is the chosen reference for traditional African religious expression due to his extensive coverage of many varieties of African spirituality and his reputable background in the area of religion. The meaning of traditional and ancient African religion in this text refers to the religious expressions and customs that were developed and practiced by the indigenous peoples of the African continent before the arrival of European cultural influences.

The term Black and African represents those people who are original inhabitants of the African land mass. Although Abbysinia, Nubia, Alkebu-lan and Kemet are more accurate terms given by the aboriginal people of this continent, Africa, African and Black will be used in this text to describe the continent, the people and those with recent ancestral ties of approximately the last two-thousand years.

The intent of this thesis is to focus on the view of what is or can be considered Afrocentric religion within the P.A.O.C.C. Looking at the similarities between Mbiti's analysis of African religion and that of the P.A.O.C.C. will move this study closer to its objective. Differences will not be examined in detail but similarities are used as a starting point for later exploration of the P.A.O.C.C.

and other institutions claiming Afrocentricity.

The reader of this thesis should be made aware that the writer of this paper is presently a working member within the P.A.O.C.C. This fact was not true when the initial idea for this thesis originated; but the writer was raised as a Christian and practiced Christianity. He also had previous leanings toward African Nationalism. These are mentioned in order to allow the reader to take into account any bias that may appear throughout this paper. Every effort has been made to avoid such.

CHAPTER 2

MBITI'S ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Introduction

The work to be done in this chapter will cover John S. Mbiti's analysis of African religion under the five aspects mentioned in the introductory chapter. Although the concentration will be upon Mbiti's view of African religion, a few other views of African theology will be included.

Before discussing revelation, as perceived in traditional African religion, the African concept of time will enlighten our understanding of this faith. "Man cannot remain forever in the Sasa period; he moves 'backwards' into the Zamani period, and yet, however far he travels in the stream of time, he remains a creature, in the stage between God and physical man."¹ As defined by John S. Mbiti, the Sasa is a range of time approximately between yesterday and 2 to 6 months in the future while the approximate time for the Zamani extends from an unspecified time in the past to the past hour. "Since the future does not exist beyond a few months, the future cannot be expected to usher in a new age, or a radically different state of affairs from what is in the Sasa and Zamani."² The

¹ John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 2d ed., (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1990), 90.

² Ibid., 23.

past holds the myths, stories and wisdom of the culture. The future is unknown. Therefore the past is the eternal resting place of all events and persons, and they transcend into the present through the myths, proverbs and teachings of the culture. Essentially, what can be drawn from this illustration of African concepts of time is that divine information is mediated through ancestors and religious founders who have moved totally into the Zamani period (forgotten ancestors) and those who exist in both Sasa and Zamani periods (ancestors remembered by the living). Those in the Zamani or Sasa/Zamani are divine instruments (angels) of God used to dispense Her infinite knowledge into portions digestible to the human condition. "Ancestors were and are a vital ambience in the life of every living African whether he or she is aware of this reality or not. Centuries of traditions have been transmitted in their essence to each successive generation as part and parcel of their cultural identity."³

Revelation

The priest, medium or diviner is a human agent who stands as "the religious symbol of God among His people [and who's duties] are chiefly religious, but since Africans do not dissociate religion from other departments of life [s/he has] many other functions."⁴ One of the priest's major task is to "contact the spiritual world by acting as a medium or having other individuals [act] as mediums."⁵ Revelation is thus mediated through specially trained persons who communicate with the spiritual realm and have more direct access

³ Daima M. Clark, Similarities Between Egyptian and Dogon Perception of Man, God and Nature, eds. Maulana Karenga and Jacob H. Carruthers (Los Angeles, CA: University of Sankore Press, 1986), 122.

⁴ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 183.

⁵ Ibid., 183.

to the will of God.

A specific example of revelation can be found within the traditional religion of the Kung people of southern Africa.

Four times a month on the average, night signals the start of a healing dance. The women sit around the fire, singing and rhythmically clapping. The men, sometimes joined by women, dance around the singers. As the dance intensifies, *num* or spiritual energy is activated in the healers, both men and women, but mostly among the dancing men. As *num* is activated in them, they begin to *kia* or experience an enhancement of their consciousness. While experiencing *kia*, they heal all those at the dance. Before the sun rises fully the next morning, the dance usually ends. Those at the dance find it exciting, joyful, powerful. 'Being at a dance makes our hearts happy,' the Kung say.

The dance is a community event in which the entire camp participates. The people's belief in the healing power of *num* brings substance to the dance. All who come are given healing. In the dance, the people confront the uncertainties and contradictions of their experience, attempting to resolve issues dividing the group, reaffirming the group's spiritual cohesion. And they do so in a way which is harmonious with their own and their culture's maintenance and growth.⁶

The *num*, spiritual energy or ecstasy that the Kung "inspire" breaks down the barriers which limited human sensory organs such as, sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, and even rationalization, allowing the seekers to enter a heightened state of consciousness or *kia*. *Kia* facilitates contact with divine knowledge from God through the ancestors. This knowledge helps them face the everyday issues that can lead to spiritual, mental and physical disharmony within the community.

Revelation comes from ascending beyond the limits of everyday human existence through the agencies of a group of seekers calling upon forces from

⁶ Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, Basics of BCN for Membership: Rebirth Triangle. Genesis II, (Detroit, MI: The Shrines of the Black Madonna of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, 1994), 82-83.

within and outside in harmony to tune into and promote spiritual healing, as well as mental and physical remedies. In part this is done to experience life more abundantly but also in order to promote the maturity of the seeker's spirit which continues its journey long after the mundane life has passed away. There is essentially a way for humankind to act in a godly way within every situation in life, and gnosis or knowledge of God is made manifest through contact with God by spiritual mediation from ancestors or what Christians might call angels. Also the recalling of God's actions in human history gives example and direction to the seeker. As can be clearly seen, revelation is not a matter of a written report of truth, but one of inwardness and orality.

God

A definition of how traditional African religions understand God is condensed by J. S. Mbiti into this statement:

God is the origin and sustenance of all things. He is 'older' than the Zamani period: He is outside and beyond His creation. On the other hand, he is personally involved in His creation, so that it is not outside of Him or His reach. God is thus simultaneously transcendent and immanent . . .⁷

This statement gives a basic description of the way African cultures view God.

More definitive is the following example of what African cultures see as God's attributes. Mbiti states, "A number of societies consider God to be omniscient, that is, to know all things, to be simultaneously everywhere (i.e. omnipresent), and to be almighty (omnipotent)."⁸ Since man is ontologically

⁷ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 29. For a more detailed examination of the concept of God, J. S. Mbiti, Concepts of God in Africa (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), is recommended.

⁸ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 30.

among the lowest on the hierarchical scale and God is at the top, humankind is limited to expressing God and His nature in mundane ways that exist in his present condition, as represented "in proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories, and religious ceremonies."⁹ Examples of God's omniscience are: "To the Zulu and Banyarwanda, God is known as 'the Wise One' and to the Akan as 'He Who knows or sees all.'"¹⁰ God's attribute of omnipresence is described as: "When the Ila say that 'God has nowhere or nowhen, that He comes to an end' [and the] Banum express the same concept in their name for God (Njinyi or Nnui) which means: 'He Who is everywhere.'"¹¹ Practical accounts of God's omnipotence are: "The Kiga refer to God as 'the One Who makes the sun set'; and when the Gikuyu make sacrifices and prayers for rain, they address God as the One Who makes the mountains quake and the rivers overflow."¹² That God is known as One in all African cultures is factual, yet the divine aspects mentioned above are sometimes given names to fit earthly concepts. "A form of [the] trinitarian concept of God is reported among the Ndebele and Shona peoples, according to which He is described as 'Father, Mother and Son.'"¹³ The ways in which the Ndebele and Shona describe God in the three divine attributes (omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience) mentioned above helps explain that African people realize God's immanence and transcendence. "For most of their life, African peoples place God in the transcendental plane, making it seem as if He is remote from their daily affairs. But they know that He is immanent, being manifested in natural

⁹ Ibid., 29.

¹⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹¹ Ibid., 31.

¹² Ibid., 32.

¹³ Ibid., 36.

objects and phenomena, and they can turn to Him in acts of worship, at any place and any time.”¹⁴ As implied within the previous section God is transcendent but is immanent when seekers raise their consciousness to a level that allows God to intervene directly.

Concerning God’s moral attributes, Mbiti concludes that,

The majority of African people regard God as essentially good, and there are many situations in which He is credited with doing good to His people. A number of peoples consider God to have a will which governs the universe and the fortunes of mankind. This will of God is exercised, however, in a just way, and African peoples consider Him to be just.¹⁵

In summation God is good and just; He rewards good conduct with good, and evil as recompense for displays of evil actions. God accomplishes these acts without fault or failure and with love because, “In the eyes of the Yoruba, God is ‘the pure King Who is without blemish, [and Africans] . . . assume that He loves them, otherwise He would not have created them.”¹⁶ God is the standard of moral good, and issues justice in a faultless, non-biased manner.

The acts of God are aspects that are limitless for God, yet can only be reality for humankind in a limited sense. One of these works is the Creation: “Over the whole of Africa creation is the most widely acknowledged work of God. This concept is expressed through saying God created all things, through giving Him the name of Creator (or Moulder, or Maker) and through addressing Him in prayer and invocations as the Creator.”¹⁷ Being the Creator of all things is beyond human comprehension but still possible for humankind to express in mundane ways. This is evident in the worldly accounts of this act, for example:

¹⁴ Ibid., 33.

¹⁵ Ibid., 36,37.

¹⁶ Ibid., 38.

¹⁷ Ibid., 39.

"The Akan title, Borebore, given to God means 'Excavator, Hewer, Carver, Creator, Originator, Inventor, Architect . . .'"¹⁸ Creation is another example of God's immanence within African theology.

God's work does not end with the initial Creation. It is continuous, seen everyday in the creation of a new day or the sprouting of a plant, mineral, or growth of an animal or humankind. All of these creations are maintained by a natural order or law established by God. The law of God sets an order for creation to exist harmoniously. In the case of humankind, God prescribes each one's destiny, yet humans have a choice whether or not to follow God's law. This is reflected in the Mende proverb that states: "If God dishes your rice in a basket, do not wish to eat soup."¹⁹ This in more direct terms means that a person should not desire to change or stand outside of God's will. Briefly, God's other continuous attributes are: provider, healer, afflicter and governor. In order to reap the benefits of these works one must seek and follow the will of God as revelation displays it.

A work of God that is very important is how God has acted on behalf of His people in the past or Zamani. Mbiti points out "that the dominant concept of history is an emphasis on the Zamani, so that history is viewed as moving from the Sasa to the Zamani period and not as movement towards the future."²⁰ God's acts in the past give valid foundation for action for those in the Sasa (recent past, present, to the remote future).

In brief, God is expressed in every aspect of traditional African life. Giving God human characteristics allows man to have access to God and also

¹⁸ Ibid., 39.

¹⁹ Ibid., 41.

²⁰ Ibid., 47.

makes some human attributes godly or divine. Those believing and seeking these divine attributes will be in fact on the way toward bringing forth their own divinity; the part of God within the aspirant. Since God has created all and all has come from God, there is a portion of God in all things. That helps to explain God's omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence.

Human Existence

African religion can be categorized as basically anthropocentric.

God is the explanation of man's origin and sustenance: it is as if God exists for the sake of man. the spirits are ontologically in the mode between God and man: they describe or explain the destiny of man after physical life. Man cannot remain forever in the Sasa period, he moves 'backwards' into the Zamani period, and yet however far he travels in the stream of time, he remains a creature, in the stage between God and physical man.²¹

Man does eventually obtain a "closer walk" with God but never truly gains the omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence of God. Man's original, created state is something different from his spiritual or physical state. Also the relationship between God and humans of the present time has changed from its original status. We will examine the African religious view of humankind for a deeper understanding of where man fits in God's order.

When looking at the origin and creation of humankind, "It is generally acknowledged that God is the originator of man [and that] the majority of African peoples place the creation of man towards or at the end of God's original work of creation."²² The ways in which man was created vary greatly from one African community to another; such as from clay, to holes, to rocks, to vessels, to trees, to legs, to even other worlds. The six methods above give humankind a more

²¹ Ibid., 90.

²² Ibid., 91.

earthly connectedness with a special place in the order of creation, while the latter "places man in a position rather different from that of other earthly created things: he comes from 'above', from 'another' region of the universe, from a position 'nearer' to God than that of other things."²³ In each case man has a particular specialness of place within the Creation. Although the methods by which man was created differ among various groups, they all teach that God made man.

As in the Hebrew and Christian Bible, many other African stories of Creation place humanity in a perfect and immortal stature within his original or "uncorrupted" state. "According to many stories of creation, man was originally put in a state of happiness, childlike ignorance, immortality or ability to rise again after dying. God also provided all the necessities of life, either directly or through equipping him to develop them, and man lived more or less in a state of paradise."²⁴

The above explanation of the original state of man is no longer totally true for the present state of humankind. The one portion of this statement that can still be considered true is God's gift of equipping humankind with the knowledge to provide life's necessities. Human necessities in most accounts include food, shelter, air and water through such means as hunting, gathering, cultivating land, house building and/or animal domestication; the means to these essentials is the predominant variation which coincides with the difference of cultures. A couple of examples of these differences are: the Ashantis who report that "He ordered animals to eat the plants, and He ordered man to do the same, and to drink from the waters, [the Acholi say], God taught

²³ Ibid., 93.

²⁴ Ibid., 93.

the first men all the essentials of living, such as cultivation of land, the cooking of food and the making of food."²⁵ These two examples of perfect humanity speak to the more mundane aspects of humankind yet there are other accounts that give man an even higher level of existence here on earth. "A number of myths speak of this as a state of happiness and blessedness: and some even say that the first men did not need to eat or drink, and therefore there was no necessity to labour for these items of existence."²⁶ In all of the myths about the first humankind there is the theme that man was much closer to God and Her blessings, which made life for those at that time much more blissful and peaceful.

Eventually, the original state of man was lost and this change exists in the myths of African cultures. At some time in the history of these cultures a chasm was formed between God and humankind. In the Mende's instance God was so accessible that in their myth "they used to go to him to ask for things so frequently that He moved off to another place."²⁷ Other cultures were given particular rules or laws to follow, such as forbidden foods, or actions; but humankind broke them, causing the separation between God and humankind. Some stories tell of a physical linkage between where God and humans live, a link that was broken by accident or by some mischievous or clumsy animal, or by women (most often in patriarchal cultures). Whatever the means of separation, the ultimate result was a less advantaged existence for humans which resulted in death, unhappiness, loss of joy and peace.

At one time humankind had direct access to God, but this too was lost for

²⁵ Ibid., 93.

²⁶ Ibid., 94.

²⁷ Ibid., 95.

one reason or another. Yet, through the ritual life of many African cultures, this was partially regained through actions of everyday life, acts which follow the many aspects of God revealed within communal work, fellowship, love, sharing and spiritual cultivation through ceremony and ritual.

Savior/Messiah

In traditional African cultures the title or position of savior is practically non-existent. There are instead specialists, such as priest, mediums and diviners, and/or national-cultural founders. The priests, mediums and diviners are in the category of keepers of the doctrine, protocol and orthodoxy of the group's religion. The founders of a culture or religion are essentially those who have received greater portions of divine revelation and teaches it to seekers of God's Way.

Although there are not any saviors in the literal sense, within many African cultures there are a number of myths that parallel the acts and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christian messiah. One example of strikingly close resemblance is that of the Sonjo, who have a religious founder known as Khambageu.

According to their myths, Khambageu just appeared among the people, 'without parents', many years ago. He lived among them, performing miracles of healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, ensuring good crops and even raising the dead. He also acted as judge, settling people's disputes; and went from one village to another, living for some years in each place. Where people got tired of him, they mistreated him and even tried to kill him, forcing him to flee to other villages. Eventually he grew old, then went into his house and died there. Before dying he instructed the people to have his body buried in a particular village, or left on a rock to dry in the sun. These people did not, however, bury him where he asked to be buried; they put him in a grave in another village. On hearing about this news, members of the village where he should have been buried went to claim the body. They dug up the grave, but

found it empty except for the sandals which Khambageu had been wearing. It was reported that some people saw him rise again from his grave and fly to the sun.²⁸

In this account the similarities to the Christian Jesus are quite apparent .

Khambageu is also "said to rule the heavens and to have the stars as his children."²⁹ The Sonjo also closely follow their "saviors" teachings by keeping customs, traditions and sacred places associated with his life.

The above example is not the only one that closely coincides with what is commonly considered a messiah (savior) within the Christian faith. In fact, some scholars have shown the origins of many of the acts, teachings and life of the Christian savior within the culture, religion and myths of the traditional African culture of the Kamau (ancient Egyptians).³⁰ Specifically, Alvin Boyd Kuhn states, that "the image of man perfected, or as the [Ancient] Egyptians said 'Osirified,' was still the ideal; Christianity, too, presented the image of the ideal, but with the difference that the image was that of a living man."³¹ Another example is the first patriarch of the Hebrews (Jews), Abraham, "in Hebrew, this name is given as Abrhm and its equivalent in Egyptian can either be Ab-ra-im or Ab-ra-hem."³² After demonstrating a direct link in etymology between Abraham and Ra, Finch reveals the theological links between the worship of Ra and the religion of Abraham. "A [form of] Ra is, Atum-Ra, the Egyptian god of circumcision, the mode of creating through himself alone. Thus Abraham's

²⁸ Ibid., 186-187.

²⁹ Ibid., 187.

³⁰ For detailed information on Kamitic culture and Christianity's borrowings from it, some references are: Alvin Boyd Kuhn, A Rebirth for Christianity, (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1970); Charles S. Finch III, M.D., Echoes of the Old Darkland, (Decatur, GA: Khenti Inc., 1991); and Gerald Massey, Gerald Massey's Lectures, (Brooklyn, NY: A&B Books, 1992).

³¹ Kuhn, A Rebirth for Christianity, 60,61.

³² Finch, Echoes of the Old Darkland, 152.

covenant-by-circumcision with God categorically proves his relation to Ra.”³³

The term “messiah” or “savior,” roughly means, “an anointed rescuer or liberator;” “anointed” connotes divinely chosen. From the example, taken from traditional Sonjo culture, a person is seen saving people from illness, injustice and even death and at the end of his life able to overcome death to rise again. Overcoming the grave can be interpreted as a sign of great power, close relation to supernatural power or chosen to wield such vitality by one superior or equal to them. Traditional African cultures may not use the terms, messiah or savior, but the religious founders within many of these myths, signify an anointed liberator.

Church

The idea of a church, according to Western understanding, is often meaningless to or different within traditional African cultures. In Western culture the church is a group of people who come together, often within a building of some kind, who have a common belief in God and how He is to be worshipped. Outside of a few weekly church functions these groups generally have no communal contact with one another. Many believers come together only once weekly or monthly and sometimes even less. Also in many cases one is allowed to join and function within this congregation of believers by only professing belief, with little or no extra demonstration of faith. To many Africans who continue to practice traditional religions and culture, this type of church or practice of reverence to God would be considered foreign and limiting.

In traditional African religion, practices of faith are present within every act of daily life. “Evidence shows that African peoples worship God at any time

³³ Ibid., 152,153.

and in any place, and there are no rules obliging people to worship at a given place or time."³⁴ Although the exercise of sacred places and objects are recognized as part of worship these are not representative of the whole of their faith. As described in the section of Africans' concept of God, it is widely accepted by believers in orthodox African religions that God is omnipresent, and God can be called upon here and now no matter where one may be.

The thought of someone walking into an African shrine or sacred place, observing acts of worship and then proclaiming that "I believe," being accepted and allowed to function fully within that community would be looked upon as foolish by Africans. In African societies, a person is born and raised into a certain belief, as it has been noted earlier. From even before birth special rituals are observed by the expecting mother, the father and close relatives. At birth the umbilical cord is processed in a ritualistic fashion. Some time after birth the name of the child is determined through divination. As the child matures through certain stages of his or her life, particular rites of passage are observed. When this young person matures and passes through rites into adulthood s/he is expected to fulfill certain rituals within the community of believers, and these roles continue throughout the life of the person. For the survivors of that person there are duties to be fulfilled for the deceased.³⁵ Essentially, to become a member of a "congregation" or the religious life of the group, one must have deep cultural ties and at the same time prove one's worthiness to become a part of that community.

Another aspect of the traditional African culture is that God's love is expressed in everyday actions and results. They do not expect blessings just

³⁴ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 71.

³⁵ Ibid., This work contains detailed examples of a variety of rituals practiced from before birth thru death and afterwards. Also descriptions of clans, totems and kinships are expressed.

because they have attended their shrines this week or prayed the "right" prayers, "Their beliefs about God are expressed through concrete concepts, attitudes and acts of worship. The individual believes what others in his community believe; it is a corporate Faith. And this faith is utilitarian, not purely spiritual; it is practical and not mystical."³⁶ In traditional African religions the religious community is not only a gathering of people praying that each will go to heaven after death; it is a way of life that expresses God's love in ways that help make others' lives within their community more abundant. "A person shows his love for another more through action than through words. So, in the same way, people experience the love of God in concrete acts and blessings; and they assume that he loves them, otherwise He would not have created them."³⁷ In essence this belief in God's love is a pact which entitles God's people to blessed lives, if they would accept and practice this love.

Yet another point that will assist in understanding the religion of Africa is recognizing the religious as well as political hierarchy of traditional African culture. Starting at the "top" of the ranking system within the culture of Africa are found the kings, queens and rulers. These high ranking persons

are not simply political heads: they are the mystical and religious heads, the divine symbol of their people's health and welfare. The individuals as such may or may not have outstanding talents or abilities, but their office is the link between human and spiritual government. They are therefore, divine or sacral rulers, the shadow or reflection of God's rule in the universe.³⁸

The succession of the ruler is sometimes determined through kinship but a look at the alternative method of rule can give hints on another step in the hierarchy.

³⁶ Ibid., 67.

³⁷ Ibid., 38.

³⁸ Ibid., 177-178.

"In some societies the new ruler is chosen by a council, chief ministers or in consultation with the spirits of the departed rulers."³⁹ These councils and ministers often consist of family heads, clan leaders, village leaders, priests and/or diviners. In any of these cases they have a status that is higher than the average person when making religious and political decisions.

Continuing the descent in rank, the priests, prophets and religious founders are located.

"Strictly speaking priests [diviners, mediums] are religious servants associated with temples; but in the African situation the word is used to cover everyone who performs religious duties whether in temples, shrines, sacred groves or elsewhere. [These persons stand] between God, or divinity, and men. Just as the king is the political symbol of God's presence, so the priest is the [religious] symbol of God among His people . . ."⁴⁰

Often the office of king and the office of priest are filled by the same person and it is he or she (queen or preistess) ". . . who officiates at sacrifices, offerings and ceremonies relating to his, [her] knowledge."⁴¹ These persons are not only religious and political leaders, "Where lengthy training is part of their preparation for the priesthood, the priests are the depositories of national customs, knowledge, taboos, theology and even oral history."⁴² Having such great amounts of knowledge allows them to qualify to fill high social and political positions, such as judges, political leaders and liturgical authorities. Unlike many western religious adaptations where the priest or minister is totally devoted to the position of the clergy and where within the Roman Catholic faith a vow of celibacy is required, African priests often participate within their

³⁹ Ibid., 179.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 182, 183.

⁴¹ Ibid., 183.

⁴² Ibid., 183.

communities in a number of mundane functions and often marry and raise children. "On the whole, they are men and women of respectable character: trustworthy, devout, obedient to the traditions of their office and to God or the divinities that they serve, friendly, kind, 'educated' in the matters of their profession, and religious."⁴³

Another branch of the hierarchy, which can still be classified under the heading of priesthood, are the healers or doctors. Like the priest they are often highly trained:

The medicine-man is in effect both doctor and pastor to the sick person. His [or her] medicines are made from plants, herbs, powders, bones, seeds roots, juices, leaves, liquids, minerals, charcoal and the like; and in dealing with the patient, he may jump over the patient, he may use incantations and ventriloquism, and he may ask the patient to perform various things like sacrificing a chicken or goat, observing some taboos or avoiding certain foods or persons--all these are in addition to giving the patient physical medicines.⁴⁴

From this example of a holistic healer's skills and duties it can be perceived that their power is strong within the community; their authority is not as widely recognized as the full fledged priest or the ruler but, on a more personal level within the community, it is highly important and respectful.

Although there is a hierarchal system that is followed within the traditional African religions it is important to note that no one person or position within these communities is more important than the group of seekers as a whole. This overriding principle prevents tyrannical rule and other abuses of positions of power and authority. If the actions of these authority figures are not beneficial for the whole of the community, that person is either corrected or removed from their rank.

⁴³ Ibid., 184.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 165.

The several doctrines of traditional African religion examined in this chapter give the basic definitions and examples of traditional African culture; thereby making it practical for comparison with the theme of this document, the Afrocentricity of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church.

CHAPTER 3

ASPECTS OF THE PAN AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Historical Overview

The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church of over forty years ago is not exactly what it is today. It is an evolving ministry that began embracing the Social Gospel in 1953, and growing into the Black Nation in 1967 and from 1976 to the present the Struggle for Inner-Transformation. These developments in its teachings hopefully display continuations of the holistic religious forms from the continent of Africa, and the adaptations of Christianity by many African captives of the Americas toward the liberation of their African brothers and sisters in Africa and the diaspora. "Everything we have done expresses the fact that we are God's Covenant Church which has afforded us the privilege of receiving continuing revelations from God, to assist us in finding the success which the Covenant promises."¹ The P.A.O.C.C. not only claims to be God's people and He their God, they are committed to:

transforming the daily ills of Black life in urban America, . . . the expansion of an independent Black power system for our survival, . . . making the

¹ Lindiwe Nyerere, 40 Years of Christian Service, The Shrines of the Black Madonna of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church: A Historical Overview of Our Church Ministry - God's Covenant Community, (Atlanta, GA: Shrines of the Black Madonna, 1993) 3.

Black church relevant to Black people, . . . bringing the Black church back to its historical Christian roots, . . . radical inner-transformation to rid Black people of the mark of slavery, . . . [and] seeking to bring all the world and its governments under submission to the will of God.²

The above statement expresses the basic ecclesiastical identity of the P.A.O.C.C.

Presently, there is not a widely circulated publication of the history of the P.A.O.C.C. However, there are some publications by one of the P.A.O.C.C.'s founding leaders, the Holy Patriarch, Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman (Albert B. Cleage, Jr.), that are broadly disseminated.³ These books contain the basic theology and ideology of the P.A.O.C.C. and sermons by Cleage. Within this history influences are detectable from such Afrocentric leaders such as: Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, Marcus Garvey and El Haj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X).

Being ripped both from African soil and its supportive religious communities has forced Africans to adopt and transform the Christian beliefs pressed upon them by their captors, the Europeans. Much of this transformation has been in the form of what James H. Cone refers to as, A Black Theology of Liberation, which is essentially "a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ."⁴ This theology is practical in that the character Jesus is African and the oppressed nation of Israel (Jews) are Africans. This view can be paralleled with the condition of

² Ibid., 3.

³ A couple of Albert B. Cleage's most widely published works are: Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church, Detroit, MI: Luxor Publishers of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, 1987, and The Black Messiah, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press Inc., 1989.

⁴ James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation, Twentieth Anniversary Edition., (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 1. More detailed information on this idea can be found within this text.

Africans under European oppression today. Some of the leaders and institutions of the past and present, such as Marcus Garvey (African Orthodox Christian Church), Richard Allen (African Methodist Episcopal Church), Elijah Mohammed (Nation of Islam) and others, have sparked many present day African Liberation Theology movements. Two such movements that are prominent in the African community in Atlanta are the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church and the present day Nation of Islam.

Originally the founder and the first three hundred embracers of the Social Gospel were members of the St. Mark's Presbyterian Church who separated over the question of community involvement and formed the St. Mark's Congregational Church. This larger rationale for the origins of what later became The Shrines of the Black Madonna was the social, economic and political pressures of the time. In the mid-nineteen forties, after the end of World War II, in which Africans of America had fought, discrimination, oppression, and violence continued against American Africans. There were changes in the conditions of Africans in America, but they were not yet given the privileges of full citizenship. "The improvement of the status of Negroes was neither uniform nor without vigorous opposition in some quarters. On the job, white workers frequently threatened to quit if blacks were employed or upgraded. While the threats were not always successful, they served to retard the advancement of Negroes."⁵ This type of resistance to African progress, along with more violent opposition, was openly prominent in all areas of life in America. Along with the prominent institutions used for African oppression such as, schools, churches and the media, there were groups of European-Americans who formed more

⁵ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans, 6th ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1988), 145.

direct establishments of persecution. "Among the new anti-Negro groups was the National Association for the Advancement of White People, with national headquarters in Washington, D.C."⁶ This organization, though not as prominent, is still effective today. "More widespread and more effective were the White Citizens' Councils, which a leading white Mississippi editor called the 'Uptown Ku Klux Klan'."⁷ Many of these groups including the official K.K.K. used harsh and often violent means to slow down and thwart progress of Africans in the United States of America. With the battle against within from St. Mark's Presbyterian Church and the battle outside from the many racist and oppressive institutions of America it was logical and necessary that Rev. Albert B. Cleage and the three hundred co-Social Gospel believers to build an institution to battle the many configurations of European' oppression of Africans in the United States of America.

This persecution was not just upon a few or some Africans in America but all so the act of gathering a community of similar believers was/is not too difficult once the apathy, ignorance and feelings of inferiority were addressed and ameliorated. How the P.A.O.C.C. accomplishes this will be discussed later within the text.

The founder of the St. Mark's Congregational Church, now the Shrines of the Black Madonna, Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman (Albert B. Cleage) was raised in Detroit during the traumatic, trying times of the early to mid-twentieth century. He was academically trained and graduated from Wayne State University and the Oberlin Graduate School of Theology. With other African national leaders of the mid-1900's working toward social, economic and political justice "he placed

⁶ Ibid., 416.

⁷ Ibid., 416.

himself in the center of the Black community's problems and conflicts; fighting against police brutality, waging successful boycotts with the Group On Advanced Leadership (G.O.A.L.) [which resulted] in hundreds of jobs for Black people."⁸ Jaramogi has organized political parties and ran for governor of Michigan. He has been at the forefront of issues such as school discrimination, African pride, economic self-help and independent African political action. The accomplishments and works he has done in the African community are numerous. His most significant and lasting achievement is founding and leading the P.A.O.C.C., where he is presently the Holy Patriarch and Master teacher.

One of the early and continuing cornerstones in the foundation of the P.A.O.C.C. is its community involvement. From some of this institution's early years, the Shrines have helped organize and build community action groups. Through working with his congregation, the Holy Patriarch of the P.A.O.C.C., Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, launched a fight against the Detroit school system in 1962. In 1964, "The very controversial FREEDOM NOW PARTY, the first all Black political party was organized by Jaramogi."⁹ In 1966,

The Inner City Organizing Committee (ICOC), an organization for direct community action [was] formed under the leadership of Jaramogi. From this organization came: The Inner City Housing Conference, the Black Retail Employees Association, The Inner City Parents Council; The Black Teacher's Workshop; The Inner City Student's Organization, The Afro-American Committee Against Racist Wars and The Michigan Inner City Organizing Committee.¹⁰

The following year

CCAC (Citywide Citizens Action Committee) was formed by Jaramogi. This brought together a federation of several Black organizations (from

⁸ Nyerere, 40 Years of Christian Service, 2-3.

⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

moderate to militant), dealing with economic development projects, such as the Black Star Food Coop, a clothing factory and a service station. [As time passed] The Sudan Import and Specialty Shop (soon renamed Shrines of the Black Madonna Bookstore and Cultural Center #1) opened¹¹

in 1970. In 1981, the

Beulah Land Farm Project Launched, with the purpose of raising an initial \$5 million to acquire our first independent full-mechanized 5,000 acre farm, which would be used for adult/youth skill training; to provide quality, whole foods for members; serve as a retreat environment for youth (free from the pitfalls of urban life); and to provide jobs for members of the Church based on the principle of service economics.¹²

Even more recent, as of 1991, the Imhotep Medical Clinic opened in Houston, part of the regional urban enclave. In addition to these community services and institutions are: the Technological Centers, which are "designed to provide Black people with the training and skills necessary to function in a modern Technological world: [Community Service Centers which] provide support systems, program for social action and the vehicles necessary for Black people to gain the benefits of communalism in an era of diminishing resources."¹³ also Nurseries and Youth Centers. Yet another activity of the Shrines in a neglected community is the Cultural Centers, these "help us to build a positive Black identity by maintaining our connection to our African heritage and culture, and leads the way for a Black Cultural Renaissance by providing a forum for creative Black artists, to display their talents in the Black community."¹⁴ These are some, but not all, of the examples of institutions and exercises implemented by The Shrines of the Black Madonna. They have been designed to deal with societal

¹¹ Ibid., 6-7, 11.

¹² Ibid., 15.

¹³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁴ Ibid., 34.

realities faced by Africans living in American urban centers. Institutions which provide for the basic needs of the community such as: health, nutrition, child care, social action, food provision, cultural enlightenment, technological awareness, housing, etc. are being given attention.

There are other religious institutions within the African community in America that provide many of these services, but a majority have accomplished this largely with European assistance and control. The P.A.O.C.C. institutions were not formed in order to satisfy some European philanthropist's guilty feelings or a European's attempt at pacifying "those blacks" a bit longer and raise their status in the eyes of Africans as the "Great White Father." Ever since March of 1953, when "three hundred members of the St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, led by Jaramogi (Reverend Albert B. Cleage, Jr.), left the church over the question [of] community involvement and formed the St. Mark's Congregational Church,"¹⁵ to the present Shrines of the Black Madonna of the P.A.O.C.C. have been independent. Independent of any monies or decrees that might lead to compromise of their goals. This independence from extra-Afrocentric influences solidified in 1969 when "The concept of a 'Black Nation' evolved; Church liturgy was developed to conform to the revolutionary religious teachings of Black Christian Nationalism."¹⁶ Black Christian Nationalism (B.C.N.) seeks

to change society in order to accomplish the liberation of Black people; . . . and we realize that we are engaged in a struggle for power and for survival. We believe that nothing is more sacred than the liberation of Black people. We must transform the minds of Black people by freeing them from dependence on white cultural values and from their unconscious acceptance of the white man's *declaration of Black Inferiority*. We must restructure our relationships within the Black Nation

¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶ Ibid., 7.

toward unity and love in preparation for a realistic power struggle against our white oppressors. We must control all the basic institutions which dominate the Black community. Self-determination and community control must become realities in every area of ghetto life.¹⁷

Also "The Black Christian Manifesto outlined the nature of our effort to restructure the ritual, organization, and program of the Black Church as a 'Black Nation'."¹⁸ Through these institutions we see a community very much aware of societal demands, needs and its effects on the African community as a whole. They are there to remedy and prevent these problems without compromise to European philanthropists.

The theology and practices of the Christianity of the Protestant Presbyterian Church was taken into the hands of Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman and 300 members of the St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, and led in a direction toward reclaiming Christianity for African people here in America. Widening this understanding of traditional African religion has encouraged this group toward the deeper spiritual and holistic aspects of Christianity. This is the foundation, the root, the submerged iceberg upon which they draw to build Afrocentric institutions, buildings, people and their spirits.

A very early indication of the recognition of the full power of their religion was found in the 1960 church calendar; which in part states, "We recognize that no area of life is separate and apart from our Christian faith, and no problem of society is too dangerous or too controversial for positive Christian action by our Church."¹⁹ It is important to stress the reliance on faith, a spiritual aspect, to deal with all that living entails.

¹⁷ Albert B. Cleage Jr., Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church, (Detroit, MI: Luxor Publishers of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, 1987). 44.

¹⁸ Nyerere, 40 Years of Christian Service, 7.

¹⁹ Ibid., 5.

Another spiritual move was, "The unveiling of the 18-foot high painting of the Black Madonna and Child launched the Black Christian Nationalist Movement on March 26, [1967] Easter Sunday; reflecting the church's belief that Jesus was a Black Messiah, a basic part of bringing Christianity back to its historical roots."²⁰ This act returned a traditionally sacred image of Christianity to an Afrocentric symbol with a connection to African Americans. Looking upon a symbol of someone not unlike themselves not only physically connects them to the sacred but allows one to recognize that the Divine Source can exist within someone who is African. This reveals a holistic aspect of religion.

In 1969, at an annual meeting of the P.A.O.C.C., the Black Christian Nationalist Manifesto was introduced. It addresses the material conditions of the African people in America, promoting a communal and cosmic spiritual alliance for liberative action in this life rather than the anthropomorphic spiritual disconnection that Europeans passed on to their African captives. It states,

The traditional 'Christian' church, in opposition to the teachings of Jesus, is structured for 'individualism' (to save individuals for a life in heaven with God). . . For Black Christian Nationalists these assertions are completely meaningless. The Black Church seeks to become the Black Liberation Struggle and 'salvation' can only be understood in terms of that struggle.²¹

Keeping within the Afrocentric tradition, the P.A.O.C.C. is working toward salvation in the present historical realm. There is no intention of waiting for an "other -worldly" salvation in which the individual puts forth no effort and is saved by the sacrifices of Jesus over two thousand years ago.

In 1971 the P.A.O.C.C. adopted a Rites of Passage: African Naming Ceremony. This assists the members in recognizing their Africanness in the

²⁰ Ibid., 6.

²¹ Ibid., 9.

mental and spiritual realms. Within that same year "The BCN CODE was adopted. It provided a moral-ethical guide for membership."²² This code set standards of conduct for successful communal living, and is very common amongst traditional African societies. Yet another development in that same year was the Shrine's use of non-canonical scriptures for guidance. The group of "The Holy Order of the Maccabees was formed as a special ministry devoted to protecting and defending the Black Nation's institutions and membership."²³ This is an example of drawing upon the spiritual power of the ancestors to assist in a safe and successful life today. Similarly "The Holy Order of Nzinga was first formed in Detroit as an all female ministry devoted to uplifting the spiritual life of the church."²⁴ This group, by its name, implies that the strength and wisdom of Queen Nzinga is being used as inspiration to fight on under uneven odds.²⁵

Delving even deeper into the esoteric roots of African spirituality, in 1976 "**THE SCIENCE OF KUA** was introduced; initiating the most profound holistic Christian religious processes of healing since the age of the ancient African priests and healers."²⁶ This

Divine System requires a struggle for Enlightenment through KUA, 'The Science of Becoming What We Already Are.' There is a Divine System in which we live, move and have our being, but of which we are seldom aware. It emanates from God who is cosmic energy and creative intelligence which created and controls the universe. God can be experienced only by breaking through the limits of the rational mind and reaching a higher level of Consciousness where the power of God becomes available to us. This state of Enlightenment must be attained

²² Ibid., 12.

²³ Ibid., 12.

²⁴ Ibid., 14.

²⁵ Queen Nzinga, in the late sixteenth century, fought off the Portuguese invaders from what is now Angola. The Portuguese eventually sued for peace. For more detailed information see Chancellor Williams, The Destruction of Black Civilization, (Chicago IL: Third World Press, 1987).

²⁶ Nyerere, 40 Years of Christian Service, 14.

before we can reject individualism and integrate Spirit/Mind/Body. The Experience of God must be constantly renewed by regular participation in the rituals of the Transforming Community (the KUA Processes), sacramental worship, confession, and mortification of the Ego.²⁷

This process is the *djed* or backbone of the P.A.O.C.C.'s transformation for initiating and promoting just, correct and liberating actions of its members. In greater detail the KUA Small Group Devotional process can be divided into seven steps; they are:

[1] [Through] invocation: we acknowledge the presence of God, [2] Discourse on the nature of God and what God expects us to do; The Covenant Relationship, [3] We have failed to satisfy our covenant relationship with God - we are sinners!, [4] Confession/Encounter and penance (& absolution), [5] Awareness: to sharpen our perception of our relationship with God and with each other, [6] We stimulate the energy within (God incarnate) through message/movements - sense of communalism, [7] Meditation: we open ourselves to the experience of God.²⁸

This ritual is clearly deeper than the European influenced Christian experience which is generally more limited.

The above discussion is a summarization of the history of the P.A.O.C.C. As the theology of the Shrines of the Black Madonna is discussed in the following section a more defined view of this institution's beginnings and evolution will be presented.

Revelation

Divine revelation within the P.A.O.C.C., similar to traditional African religious practices, is derived from group oriented spiritual rituals and every day life. We may here note that the P.A.O.C.C. considers all acts within life as

²⁷ Ibid., 17.

²⁸ Ibid., 32.

sacred.

We believe that God is the limitless cosmic energy and creative intelligence out of which all things in the universe are created and within which all things exist. The universe is a Divine System -- the matrix of all life, an endless interconnected field of energy and intelligence in which we all live, move and have our total being.²⁹

This statement is one, within the P.A.O.C.C.'s culture, which basically says "that God never comes to an end anywhere or at anytime,"³⁰ an often repeated saying among African people in Zambia. Fundamentally, revelation can come to seekers within the beliefs of the P.A.O.C.C. at any time and any place. Although this divine knowledge can be obtained without borders of time or space, the P.A.O.C.C. has a systematic process by which to enhance or open the seeker to the gnosis or will of God.

The systems designed to heighten the seeker's perception of divine knowledge within the P.A.O.C.C. is a twofold task and covers all aspects of life; from the physical diet, to the mental diet, to the social interactions, to the rituals that are regularly exercised in order to aid the transcendence of the seeker. The task is twofold because, unlike unadulterated African culture, continental Africans and Diaspora Africans have been raised within or greatly influenced by a non-holistic, divisive and oppressive culture of the West, rather than the unifying and consolidating cultures of many traditional Bandung peoples.³¹ For

²⁹ Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, Basics of BCN for Membership: Rebirth Triangle - Genesis II, (Detroit, MI: Pan- African Orthodox Christian Church, 1994), 13.

³⁰ John S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, 2d ed., (Oxford: Heinemann International Literature and Textbooks, 1991), 57.

³¹ This name generally connotes indigenous peoples of nations that are not of the European peninsula or Eastern Europe. The name Bandung comes from the gathering of leaders from approximately 29 African, and Asian nations in April of 1955 at Bandung, Indonesia. At that time these leaders were representing roughly 1.35 billion people. A greater understanding of the Bandung Conference conception, birth, growth and evolution can be found within the annual Third World 93/94. Robert J. Griffiths, ed., Third World, 93/94 (Guilford, CT: Dushkin Publishing Group Inc., 1993).

the P.A.O.C.C. the process of revelation is partially in the reeducation of African Americans, to the wisdom of traditional African culture. As stated above this is accomplished through a unified system of institutions, beliefs and other acts cultivating holistic living. Much of this system employed by the P.A.O.C.C. will be explored in greater detail in later sections and chapters.

Although much of the revelation within the P.A.O.C.C. is derived from the disclosures of ancestors through verbal (stories, myths, proverbs) or written information (Pert Em Heru [Egyptian Book of the Dead], Qumran texts, Holy Bible), both sources implement a process that complements past revelation in the present. This process is called The KUA Triangle, comprised of mind, body and spirit, where the spirit aspect is basic.

The KUA Disciplines are designed to assist the Seeker in overcoming fragmentation, by restoring wholeness to the human energy organism, by completely healing the human energy system (freeing it from energy blocks which cause weak transmissions through the auric bodies). This reunites the Seeker's mind/body and spirit and allows him/her free access to the higher levels of energy that emanates from God.³²

The auric bodies and energy mentioned in the above quote are spiritual energy that surrounds and permeates the seeker, and this energy is accessed by the enlightened and open seeker. The rituals and sacraments of KUA accomplish the above "through participation in the sacraments, meditation, dance and prayer, all of which unify the inner life force (God incarnate) of a seeker with the limitless life force and power of God transcendent."³³

A most powerful ritual of the KUA reality is the KUA Small Group Devotional. "The KUA Small Group Devotional is a systematic sustained Group

³² Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, Holy Patriarch, Introduction to KUA Theology & Program: Christian Science of Rebirth and Healing, 3d ed., (Atlanta, GA : Shrines of the Black Madonna of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, 1994), 44.

³³ Ibid., 35.

Process that takes a Group of Seekers through 'Seven (7) distinct steps to the climactic experience of God in Kugasana' (Jaramogi)."³⁴ These seven steps are led by trained clergy or mediums who enhance the seekers' way toward healing. The seven steps are: 1. invocation, 2. discourse on the nature of God and what God expects her/him to do, 3. acknowledgement of failure to fulfill covenant, 4. confession/encounter and penance (and absolution), 5. awareness of his/her relationship with God and each other, 6. stimulation of energy within (God incarnate) through massage/movements, 7. opening of seekers to the experience of God through meditation. "Each step gradually erodes the walls of separation in which the group becomes more open to each other and to God. The KUA Small Group Devotional is a PROCESS, a Spiritual JOURNEY! In the intimacy of the KUA Small Group Devotional, Seekers express their feelings about God and each other."³⁵

To obtain increased comprehension of KUA, additional details of this portion of this system will be illustrated. The KUA Small Group Devotionals are generally held weekly or bimonthly. Seekers come together at an agreed time after sunset, taking care to dress uniformly and observing food consumption recommendations which encourage unity and settlement of the digestive system. After entering the appointed meeting place (chapel, shrine), the seeker is encouraged to center one's self within the sasa (present) and to put aside past and future fantasy through participation in yoga movements, breathing technics and observing silence or meditative music (generally recorded). The seekers are then lead into the first step which is Invocation: acknowledgement of the presence of God. "The group of Seekers becomes aware of the presence

³⁴ Nyerere, 40 Years of Christian Service, 32. Kugasana is a Swahili word translated by the P.A.O.C.C. as meaning, becoming all that God meant one to be.

³⁵ Ibid., 32.

of God within the Sacred Circle and their personal need for God's Healing Power; to let go, call upon the Power of God, to make an opening."³⁶ This process is accompanied by group prayer, chanting within the tight formation of a circle by the seekers.

The second step, consisting of discourse, is lead by the fundi, mwalimu or cardinal (priest) concerns the nature of God and what God expects of the seeker within the covenant relationship. In this step the group of seekers raise their awareness of God's nature and their roles within the will of God through talking

about the Nature of God and our Covenant Relationship as they apply to what we are doing. We are talking about the way we live, what we do everyday and we try to make our group fellowship reflect the nature of God and the fact that we have a Covenant relationship with God. Inherent in our faith is to do the will of God. The discourse illustrates what God expects us to do and reinforces the belief of our Covenant Relationship.³⁷

Next, the group of faithful acknowledge their failure to meet the terms of their Covenant Relationship with God. In unison, a prayer for the courage to see, hear, confess and feel the shame and injustice of living outside of the Covenant Relationship is offered up. Deep feelings of remorse and regret arise within the seekers; as moans come forth and tears flow as the extra-covenant acts surface. These extra-covenant acts are those acts that keep seekers from being "the People of God (Communal)."³⁸

The fourth phase is a time for confession of non-covenant acts by the seekers, revealing the alienating acts of other seekers, and finally agreeing to carry out acts of penance to aid healing of relationships between fellow

³⁶ Ibid., 32.

³⁷ Ibid., 32.

³⁸ Ibid., 32.

believers and God. The seekers at this time are open to give and to receive caring criticism and self-criticism through their heightened awareness of God's power within and around them.

In confession the contrite Seeker sincerely admits that his/her actions have alienated others causing the Seeker to fail to satisfy the Covenant Relationship with God. Members admit their own sin, the sin of others, and encounter each other to assist each member in becoming aware of his behavior; how his behavior affects the feelings of others, influences the opinions others have of him and influences his/her opinion of self (self-concept). Conflicts are resolved lovingly and connections re-established between members to repair energy blocks caused by alienation. Penance involves acts of reconciliation; through daily prayers, scriptures, acts of kindness, a member reconciles himself with his brothers and sisters and God, thus satisfying the Covenant Relationship.³⁹

These acts of confession and encounters are done within the KUA Small Group devotional, while penance is accomplished within the everyday lives of the supportive, understanding and caring environment of the community of seekers.

The following step begins with chanting, ceremonial washing, bell ringing, followed by continued chanting and compact circle formation. This fifth step is called Awareness and is closely tied to the preceding step. "Awareness: to sharpen our perception which sharpens perception of our relationship with God and with each other - Members have grown less and less aware of their own sensations, emotions, thoughts, and physical sensitivity."⁴⁰ The intense, harmonious chanting and physical closeness brings about a combining of the more intimate auric fields into one highly perceptive energy field. While "The fourth step begins the process of feeling again,"⁴¹ this steps hones the seekers holistic sensation.

³⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁴¹ Ibid., 32.

The sixth step in the KUA devotional involves a combination of yoga movements and massage, promoting a more relaxed atmosphere. The P.A.O.C.C. describe this step in this way: "We stimulate the energy within (God incarnate) through massage/movements - sense of communalism - Both disciplines create a 'suspension of the will'(Jaramogi), where the energy level of the group is sensed to be more relaxed, peaceful, harmonious, and communal."⁴² This suspension of the will is a form of "letting go and letting God."

After seekers have called upon awareness of God; reaffirmed God's nature and what S/He expects of them; acknowledged their breeches of pact relationships between one another and God; confessed, encountered one another's contractual failures and agreed to penance; heightened awareness of their relationship with God and with each other, and with their whole sensate system; stimulated the inner energy they possess and freed their wills to God; they are ready for the final step of revelation from God. In step seven, "Meditation: We open ourselves to the experience of God 'With all resistance done away with and barriers removed'(Jaramogi), it is possible to come upon God. This step utilizes techniques that lead members past the rational mind."⁴³ Briefly, KUA Small Group Devotionals, along with the whole of P.A.O.C.C. life, helps the seeker come upon gnosis, Christ, or revelation.⁴⁴ In closing of this sacrament "We acknowledge the presence of God through thanksgiving; this

⁴² Ibid., 32.

⁴³ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁴ Christ(Karast) is the inner divinity within humankind. Explained in greater detail within text, such as: Charles S. Finch III, M.D., Echoes of the Old Darkland: themes of the African Eden, (Decatur, GA: Khenti, Inc., 1991); Alvin Boyd Kuhn, A Rebirth for Christianity, (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1970); Gerald Massey, Gerald Massey's Lectures, (Brooklyn, NY: A&B Books, 1992).

will be about three hours later; we prepare to close, we relax and rest for a minute, meditate and we ought to have been changed by the meeting, by the fellowship."⁴⁵ This whole process promotes healing of their covenant relationship with God and one another.

God

In the previous section, which talks about Revelation, a basic statement that pertains to the Doctrine of God was made. Again, in slightly different words, this theological statement is reiterated: "In the theology of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, we believe that God is the infinite field of cosmic energy and creative intelligence out of which all things in the universe are created and within which all things exist."⁴⁶ In order to envision the P.A.O.C.C.'s concept of God more fully, besides revelation, they have supported this pantheistic view with information from three areas of study. They are: Biblical witness, Ancient African Religion and contemporary science.

The first portion of information bracing the pantheistic concept of God by the P.A.O.C.C. is from the myth of Creation within the book of Genesis (Biblical witness). It reads, "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters."⁴⁷ The P.A.O.C.C. interprets this passage in these terms, ". . . in the beginning there was nothing but God - nothing but divinity. Then God began the act of creation. There being nothing in the beginning but divinity, the substance of creation could have been

⁴⁵ Agyeman, Basics of BCN for Membership, 134.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 65.

⁴⁷ Gen. 1:1-2 NRSV

nothing else but God or divinity."⁴⁸ In other words, God was all because nothing else existed, so when God created things they were merely extensions of It's Self, and now God continues to be everything through the infinite extensions of It's Self.

The next basis of the P.A.O.C.C.'s pantheistic view comes from what is believed to be the roots of the original Christianity and other African religion; that foundation is the ancient religions of Africa. The P.A.O.C.C. comprehends that,

The mystics and priests of ancient Africa and other non-western cultures came to know the nature of God through direct religious experience. In their sacred religious rites and disciplines, they encountered an infinite power that both permeated and transcended themselves and all things. They discerned, through their religious experience, that beyond the boundaries of the rational mind, there exists a wholeness and unity of existence stemming from the reality of God.⁴⁹

This statement recalls the P.A.O.C.C.'s belief of Revelation and the beliefs of God and Revelation within traditional African religion which were summarized in previous sections and chapter. The P.A.O.C.C. also recognizes that this view of God was practiced and spread by one of the oldest documented religious systems, the African Mystery System. "The main temple of the African Mystery System was at Luxor in Upper Egypt and there were affiliate centers from Africa to India."⁵⁰ The P.A.O.C.C. recognizes the connection to Judaism and Christianity of the African Mystery System. "According to George James, Moses and Jesus were both ordained priests in the African Mystery System."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Agyeman, Basics of BCN for Membership, 65.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 69.

⁵¹ Ibid., 70.

The third buttress of the P.A.O.C.C.'s theological perspective consist of information found within physics of this century. "The physicists have discovered, through mathematics and scientific experimentation, that everything in the universe is some form of energy. Matter is simply bound energy. So everything in the universe tangible and intangible, is a particular manifestation of the same fundamental substance - energy."⁵² This quote is supported by scholars such as Heinz Pagels, Fritjof Capra, and Robert Ornstein. In conclusion the P.A.O.C.C. resolves that, "This primal transcendent field of energy and intelligence is God or divinity."⁵³ In addition to revelation, the P.A.O.C.C. upholds it's concept of God with ancestral as well as contemporary disclosure.

It has been effectively demonstrated that within the P.A.O.C.C. God is omnipresent, an attribute which complements God's omniscience and omnipotence. The rejection of a anthropomorphic God allows the seeker within the P.A.O.C.C. to proficiently begin to comprehend the all-powerfulness of God. The concept of a anthropomorphic God is disputed by these questions: "*How does one access a God who is a distant super being? What is the nature of 'his' power? How does 'he' in fact control the content of all life? How does 'he' select and respond to the millions of prayers that constantly come 'his' way?*"⁵⁴ To answer these questions which pertain to the omniscience and omnipotence of God in a way that can be rationally understood, the P.A.O.C.C. answers, "*God is the limitless field of energy and creative intelligence out of which all things are created and within which all things exist.*"⁵⁵ This statement is clearly

⁵² Ibid., 72.

⁵³ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁴ Agyeman, Introduction to KUA Theology & Program, 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 4.

consistent with what is known pertaining to how the cosmos exists.

Other attributes of God can be found within how S/He acts within human experience. "The Black Christian Nationalist (B.C.N.) Creed" addresses the important attributes of God recognized by the faithful within the P.A.O.C.C. "His creative power is visible in the mysteries of the universe, in the revolutionary Holy Spirit which will not long permit men to endure injustice nor to wear the shackles of bondage, in the rage of the powerless when they struggle to be free, and in the violence and conflict which even now threaten to level the hills and the mountains."⁵⁶ Analysis of this portion of the B.C.N. creed, within the first stanza of this statement of faith, reveals aspects already examined and those that are mundane in character. The trait of the "revolutionary Holy Spirit" contains the aspects of abhorring injustice and bondage; manifestation of furor in those straining under arrested power development; and in the warfare that seeks to correct these injustices. In other terms, the characteristics of God are: justice, freedom, opposition to power blocks and harmony. These three main qualities of God are broad but as the other doctrines of the church are examined it will become apparent how these attributes of God are known and practiced within the seekers in the P.A.O.C.C.

Humanity

The religion of the P.A.O.C.C. discussed indirectly within the previous section will help explain what is their view of humanity. Basically, humankind, like all other creations of God, are extensions of Her/Him. Examining the first couple of verses in the book of Genesis explains that there was nothing before God, therefore all things S/He created are but parts of the whole which is God.

⁵⁶ Cleage, Black Christian Nationalism, xiii.

The teachings of the Shrines of the Black Madonna on this subject are:

Man is not separated from God - that idea is a lie that came out of the distorted conception of salvation derived by the Christian Church, through the false teachings of the Apostle Paul. There is no original sin that separated all of mankind from God! Nothing in creation can be separated from God because God fills the universe. God is the universe! Unless there were a way to get out of the universe, nothing or no one can't be separated from God. People, conditioned by the world, can only be separated from an awareness that God is everywhere.⁵⁷

Humankind has never been separated from God, only humankind's lack of awareness has placed an illusionary chasm between himself and God. The myth within the third chapter of Genesis supports this loss of humankind's awareness of God. When God created humankind, people were instructed on how to maintain balance with all that God had created. But,

when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.⁵⁸

Here is revealed humankind's temporary divestiture of God's presence that resulted in punishment or compensation for their inharmonious acts. Showing the unity and inter-relatedness of humankind's actions upon the rest of creation the myth goes on to tell of the result of their (Adam & Eve) actions, its effect upon all humanity.

Humanity is not only a part of creation within the God's creation but has an important role within it. In the later creation story, humankind is placed at the end of Creation and given particular attributes and responsibilities. After

⁵⁷ Agyeman, Basics of BCN for Membership, 11.

⁵⁸ Gen. 3:6-8 NRSV

creating the heavens, earth, plants, animals, etc., "God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'"⁵⁹ This, also a myth from text used by the P.A.O.C.C., explains more of their view of humanity. Humans creation is placed at the end of God's initial creating process, humankind is given the likeness (attributes) of God and finally given directives on how to maintain a harmonious existence with God's other creations.

This institution considers the present state of humanity as sinful, because "we were born into a racist individualistic world that has alienated us from self, one another and God. In our oppressor's world we exist within the illusion of living in a universe of separation and isolation."⁶⁰ This false concept deludes the seeker into believing that God is not accessible, which blocks the seeker from attempting to realize his/her own divinity. With a belief in this conception the man or woman gives in to the conditions of human existence, ignorant to the power of God accessible to him or her. The P.A.O.C.C. works toward awakening sinners from their ignorance and re-integrating their minds, bodies and spirits "and an experience of oneness with God."⁶¹

In summation the doctrine of humanity within the P.A.O.C.C. is that present humankind is in a position between the rest of creation and the original state of humankind, where God is at the top, original man, present man and remainder of creation at the bottom in descending order.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2 :26.

⁶⁰ Agyeman, Basics of BCN for Membership, 14.

⁶¹ Ibid., 14.

Savior/Messiah

Like most if not all of Christianity, next to God, Jesus is the center of the faith. Yet, in the P.A.O.C.C., they have rejected the Pauline Christianity which was highly criticized by the original disciples of Jesus. The P.A.O.C.C., from examination of the historical context of the faith in Jesus realizes that there were "two distinctly different gospels about Jesus. One was Messianic and committed to a faith that would bring about deliverance of the nation from its earthly bondage. The other [was] committed to a faith that would save individuals beyond the grave."⁶² Further, the P.A.O.C.C. understands that the Christianity represented within a vast majority of Protestant and Catholic denominations today, Pauline Christianity, was institutionalized by the Roman empire in 325 C.E. for purely power retention. This Roman or European ordained Christianity did not and does not serve the purpose of the oppressed which contradicts the original teachings of Jesus.

Instead, the P.A.O.C.C.'s views of Jesus resemble those of the "Jewish Jesists [in the first century of this era. These Jews] clung to the Jewish Torah and refused to accept, for instance, the legend of the Virgin Birth, and in general the 'Son of God' theory. Their faith in Jesus was limited to a belief in a mere Jewish Messiah who was expected to restore sovereignty to Israel."⁶³ The "Jewish Jesist" were followers of Jesus' teachings prior to the label Christian. The two main groups were called "Nazarenes" and "Ebionites." This similar view of Jesus as a Messiah/Savior is reflected within the second stanza of the Black Christian Nationalist Creed. "I believe that Jesus, the Black Messiah, was a revolutionary leader, sent by God to rebuild the Black Nation Israel and to

⁶² Ibid., 28.

⁶³ Ibid., 53.

liberate Black people from powerlessness and from the oppression, brutality and exploitation of the white gentile world."⁶⁴ Jesus is perceived as a founder or continuation of a African revolutionary movement, who through God's power was trying to organize the African Nation of Jews within Judea (modern day Israel) to overcome Roman (European) domination.

The P.A.O.C.C. not only regards Jesus as a revolutionary leader but also a spiritual leader through his life as an example. They believe, through Jesus's actions and his unwavering commitment to the covenant⁶⁵, that he was able to become acutely aware of his inner divinity allowing him access to great amounts of teaching, preaching, liberating and healing power. Throughout the canonical gospels of the the Catholic and Protestant churches there are examples of his crowd drawing preaching, parable style of teaching, and healing of many ill people. His liberating power was not fully realized within his lifetime, but he emphasized his commitment to the liberating aspects of the covenant. From Isaiah Jesus read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."⁶⁶

In summary, the P.A.O.C.C. knows Jesus, or the character of Jesus, as a revolutionary, nationalistic leader in a line of Jewish leaders that sought liberation for their people. They have found this view of the messianic leaders

⁶⁴ Cleage, Black Christian Nationalism, xiii.

⁶⁵ The covenant is the agreement made between God and the patriarch of the Jewish people. It basically gives a land inheritance to the Jewish people and a mutual agreement to be their God and that they be His people. Details can be found within Genesis starting with the fifteenth chapter and within many of the books and chapters that follow within the Holy Bible or Jewish Torah.

⁶⁶ Luke 3:18-19 NRSV

within the Protestant Old Testament and Apocryphal books.⁶⁷

Church

The foundation to the Shrines of the Black Madonna of the P.A.O.C.C. can be summed up within these statements:

The Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church has rediscovered the historical Jesus and the religious faith to which he was actually committed. The religious faith and practices of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church represent the one true continuation of the Messianic ministry of Jesus and its resurrection in the Jerusalem Church born at Pentecost.⁶⁸

Within the above doctrine of messiah/savior it was discovered that the P.A.O.C.C. views Jesus as "a Black man born of a Black woman and anointed by God as the expected Messiah of the Black Nation Israel."⁶⁹ Jesus was also a devout follower of the covenant with God in the Jewish faith, and it would follow that the legacy that he left would be in the form of a messianic, covenant ministry. The P.A.O.C.C. believes that "everything that Jesus taught, everything that he said is relevant to the Liberation Struggle in which Blacks are engaged, [therefore they] involve Black people in the Black Liberation Struggle by using the teachings of Jesus in the synoptic Gospels, and the Old Testament concept of nation, to show Black people how coming together with Black pride and Black power is basic to survival."⁷⁰

Whom do African people seek liberation from? At the time Jesus, the

⁶⁷ Protestant Apocryphal books include: Tobit, Judith, 1st Maccabees, 2nd Maccabees, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Esther (Greek), Letter of Jeremiah, Prayer of Azariah, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh, 1st Esdras, 2nd Esdras, Psalms 151, 3rd Maccabees and 4th Maccabees. See Holy Bible New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1993).

⁶⁸ Agyeman, Basics of BCN for Membership, 16.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁰ Cleage, Black Christian Nationalism, 41.

original followers of Jesus and Jewish people at large were suffering from Roman oppression. Presently, the P.A.O.C.C. "understand that the World System of Power dominated and controlled by the white west is an Enemy System for all Black people, consisting of institutions from which we are excluded and which serve the interest of our oppressor."⁷¹ The messianic mission is apparent in the P.A.O.C.C.'s efforts for liberation by its usage of the full gospel of Jesus and his followers, the Old Covenant (Old Testament) and the Apocryphal books. They use these text in the defining of their struggle: their enemy and their salvation. Again, referring to the Black Christian Nationalist Creed, the P.A.O.C.C. gives support to this aspect of the Church. "I believe that the revolutionary spirit of God, embodied in the Black Messiah, is born anew in each generation and that Black Christian Nationalists constitute the living remnant of God's Chosen People in this day, and are charged by Him with the responsibility for the Liberation of Black people."⁷² The lifetime struggle and spirit of Jesus is the lifetime struggle of the seekers in the P.A.O.C.C. in the present.

The last meter of their creed explains the other doctrine of the church: "I believe that both my survival and my salvation depend upon my willingness to reject Individualism and so I commit my life to the Liberation Struggle of Black people and accept the values, ethics, morals and program of the Black Nation defined by that struggle and taught by the Black Christian Nationalist Movement."⁷³ The P.A.O.C.C. is building a culture counter to the materialistic, individualistic and capitalistic culture that deeply influences and oppresses the

⁷¹ Agyeman, Basics of BCN for Membership, 32.

⁷² Cleage, Black Christian Nationalism, xiii.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, xiii.

individualistic and capitalistic culture that deeply influences and oppresses the totality of the individuals within it. They believe that

Once we have over come the inner imprisonments of niggerization and the Conditioned Self, we will regain the ability to function in a Transforming Community (Communal Society). The communal counter-culture of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, offers us unity, structure, order and discipline, undergirded by a sense of divine meaning and purpose (Transcendence).⁷⁴

This portion of the P.A.O.C.C.'s church doctrine emphasizes their its in building a way of life that will free the members from all forms of oppression of the mind, body and spirit. Through the ancient African culture of communalism, lived and taught by Jesus, they structure their lives around God and communal love.

Important within the BCN Code of the Shrines of the Black Madonna is the respect and observance of the church's hierarchal structure. The strict adherence to the hierarchal structure helps insure accountability, uniformity, organization, loyalty, discipline, a clearly defined chain of command and the well being and safety of the group and individuals within the group. Before going directly into the hierarchy of the P.A.O.C.C., it will be valuable to note the hierarchal structure of the African nation of Israel given within their historical text. Having already been divided into tribes they "...took the leaders of [their] tribes, wise and reputable individuals, and installed them as leaders over [groups], commanders of thousands, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens, and officials, throughout the tribes."⁷⁵ Although the Shrines' hierarchy may not exactly follow the African nation Israel's hierarchy it gives a basis to their chain of command.

⁷⁴ Agyeman, Basics of BCN for Membership, 33.

⁷⁵ Deut. 1:15.

Starting at the head of the chain of command is the "Holy Patriarch - The highest position of leadership in the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church."⁷⁶ Presently, Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman holds this position of authority which encompasses all regions in which P.A.O.C.C. institutions and groups operate. He is the master teacher and founder of this establishment and is gifted with wisdom, reputation and spiritual power needed for such a position of authority. His adherence to the covenant and to God is a living example of rejection of individualism and dedication to the struggle for the liberation of African people.

Next in line is the Regional Bishop and like the name this person is over a region of the P.A.O.C.C. For example: the Bishop for the Southern Region here in the United States of America has authority over the institutions and groups within the south eastern states. This person also is endowed with a high quality of wisdom, reputation and spiritual fortitude. The responsibilities of this position is to give direction and service to the faithful within the region in accordance to God, the Holy Patriarch and the Nation. The duties of the Regional Bishop include the leading of ceremonies, sacraments and classes. This office is obtained through great amounts of training and study as are many positions of leadership within the P.A.O.C.C.

Under the Regional Bishop in rank are the ministers, bishops, and cardinals within his/her regional authority. All of these are ministers within the community and their rank in descending order are: cardinals, bishops and ministers. The amount of training, service, wisdom and spirit parallels the order of hierarchy also. All of these persons are active in the leading of sacraments,

⁷⁶ Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, Black Christian Nationalist Glossary, 4th ed. (Detroit, MI: Shrines of the Black Madonna of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, 1994), 35.

ceremonies and groups.

The Shrine Administrator directs the institutions of the Shrine within that region, such as: cultural centers, and the Holy Orders of the P.A.O.C.C. Also this person coordinates department heads, group leaders and the command council. The duties of facilitating sacraments and ceremonies are also duties of this office.

As can be predicted by the pattern above continues throughout the community where rank and responsibilities descend into smaller groups and less responsibility which requires less training. In summary all members are acculturated to take on responsibilities within the community for the benefit of the Shrines and African people.

This brief description of how the P.A.O.C.C. perceives revelation, God, humanity, savior/messiah and church will give basis for comparison with Mbiti's analysis of African religion.

CHAPTER 4

COMPARISON: MBITI'S AFRICAN RELIGION VS. P.A.O.C.C.

Now that an explanation of both the different aspects of John S. Mbiti's interpretation of African religion and that of the theology of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church have been presented in a systematic way, they can now be examined in terms of their similarities and differences. This comparison will then aid in drawing conclusions concerning the relationship, or lack of such, between the two.

Revelation

Both Mbiti's analysis of African religion and the P.A.O.C.C. are entrenched in the belief that "God is omnipresent, and he is 'reachable' at any time and any place."¹ This comparable faith promotes their parallel view on how knowledge is derived from God. Mbiti's analysis of African religion, first of all, believes that revelation can come and is promoted by a group of like minded people within all parts of everyday life. In Mbiti's analysis of African religion all actions in life are considered to be sacred because God permeates and surrounds all that is. Therefore God is immanent and transcendent at the same

¹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 73.

time. The example of the Kung Nation demonstrates an example of how they receive *num* (spiritual energy), reunion with God and their fellow community members, through the medium of music, chanting, singing, dancing, closeness and each other. They realize that it takes a group with strong faith in the same belief to grasp the healing power of God; harmonizing their energies and releasing all blocks to enhance their perception and absorption of *num*. This occurrence of arriving at knowledge (gnosis) does not come from only participating in the healing ceremony. It is ingrained within their belief system of laws, customs, social interactions, nature interactions, diet (mental, physical and spiritual); from before birth (*sasa*), through life and through death (*zamani*).

The P.A.O.C.C. obtains knowledge in this same communal, African way. Even though they are at a distance from being totally isolated from Western influences, this institution has and continues to build a counter-culture with its own system of beliefs which are based upon African religion. The KUA Group Devotional is an example of the tapping of African roots. As described earlier, this sacred ceremony is an extension of the everyday system of KUA that encompasses all actions in life; this serves, as a whole, as the medium in the process of unifying the faithful with God. The seven steps within the KUA devotional process, explained earlier, allows the seeker to be open to God (the True Self). This is, like the African religion interpreted by Mbiti, a healing religious process of the group to God's power, healing and knowledge.

God

In Mbiti's analysis of African religion it was revealed that God has "nowhere or nowhen,"² in other words, is everywhere at all times. It has a

² Ibid., 31.

pantheistic view of God that permeates all of their culture which recognizes His immanence as well as His transcendence within stories and proverbs: from the mundane names they attach to God: "Molder, Mother, Father, Child; [and to the magnificent names like:] Watcher of everything, He Who knows all and the Discerner of hearts."³ These labels are given to God in a process to understand the attributes and nature of God and not to put Him in the confines of something mundane. It is part of the culture that recognizes the all powerfulness, all knowing and all presence of God while at the same time realizing that God's power and knowledge is accessible everyday and is present in all Her creations, including humans. The African religion acknowledges the transcendence of God in the way Africans view the cosmos as God and all of it's variety as portions of that divinity. Immanence is confirmed within their myths and historical accounts of founders, brave fighters, geniuses, leaders and nations, all moving with the request and reception of power from God.

The P.A.O.C.C.'s perception of God is along the same lines as Mbiti's interpretations. They see God as all-encompassing energy without limits of time or space. They support these claims through Biblical accounts, modern physical science and direct references to African religion. These supporting means gives the faithful strong evidence towards God's omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, thus His transcendence. Concerning God's immanence, they see how God participated in the history of the African Nation of Israel; through oppression, war, trials, and successes, God's power was used to promote them when abiding by the Covenant and against them when living outside of the Agreement. Outside of Biblical text they recognize God's

³ Ibid., 36,39.

immanence in persons and groups such as: Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Marcus Garvey, the Mau Mau of Kenya and certain political parties such as Z.A.N.U. and Z.A.P.O. of Zimbabwe.

In both Mbiti's African Religion and the P.A.O.C.C. God is seen as the transcendent Creator and Sustainer of all things. At the same time, present in both religions are the immanent aspects manifest in God's power, working through their ancestors of the past (*zamani*) and within themselves presently (*sasa*). Also it is important to note that both realize that God is active in the process of yoking His people for the work of healing and truly liberating them as a group, village, nation and people.

Humanity

Within African religion humankind is born in an unconditioned, close to God state. This idea is manifest in the way it pictures humankind within the cosmos and in this case a newborn child is in a spiritually unconditioned state and has just come from an existence between God and humankind. Humanity is to experience God's creation while staying unified with God, which translates into unity with all God's creation (which is part of God). Therefore, the people of a faith are born and live within a community which is designed and maintained for the propagation of a godly existence while experiencing God's creation in human form. The community for their spiritual growth within the experience of God is evidenced in the ceremony and ritual that precedes the birth of a child, proceeds throughout the life of the individual and continues after the physical death of that person. In Mbiti's analysis of African religion humanity is an extension of God rather than being a creature disconnected from Her through

original sin.

The P.A.O.C.C. also rejects the individualistic way to salvation. The church fully realizes that the retention and growth of spiritual oneness with God depends upon the quality of the community in which the individual is born, raised and lives. To induce a godly experience of God's creation, the P.A.O.C.C. realizes its covenant with God, which is to change those who have submitted to the conditions of the world and through them create and maintain a continuous community of totally liberated people open to God.

Although the P.A.O.C.C. has to toil with a people who have succumbed to the Western idea of living in sin and doing little about it, they also are in the process of reestablishing a covenant and process that will conform to what God has required for the human community to experience.

Savior/Messiah

The concept that concentrates on the death and resurrection of one man that can "wash away" all the sins of those who profess to believe in him gives no incentive for action to save oneself and others. This is the kind of theology which the P.A.O.C.C. must overcome within the African community, to a level that will enable the community to give seekers a messiah of action and history. As quoted above within the Black Christian Nationalist Creed, the members believe their messiah (an African) to be a revolutionary leader, empowered by God, working and living to rebuild, reunite and recommit a nation to their covenant to God in order to resist and overcome Roman (European) oppression. Essentially, Jesus worked to save the African nation of Israel from becoming a divided, assimilated, individualistic, non-African people. This

Savior was not magically going to liberate his people but rather through example in actions and words and emphasis on the covenant way of life established by their ancestors.

According to Mbiti's analysis of African religion there is no formal savior or messiah within African theology. However, looking at the founders and mythical characters of this traditional religion, the label of savior can be attached to many of them. Besides the example given above within the section pertaining to Mbiti's analysis of African religion's savior/messiah, there is the myth of Ausar (Osiris) of Ancient Egyptian religion, one of the world's first messiahs. Ausar presented a way of living that was covenanted with the African people of Khamit in order that they might live in a civilized, holistic manner; a strong, unified nation. Basically, saving them from becoming a non-people and being swallowed by competing nations.

Church

The doctrine of the church, is generally associated with the Christian religion, whether it is Catholic or Protestant. The P.A.O.C.C. is a community that seeks to establish a larger community and way of life centered around the covenant relationship which they have with God. Every aspect of their life spirals around building institutions and developing people that will constantly pursue the balance of divinity and their earthly experience; liberation for all African people. The P.A.O.C.C. deals with the constantly changing world and how the reality of African people corresponds to it and is analyzed for probable action to meet the needs of it's faithful. The system is designed to promote access to the power of God that will liberate them from mental, physical and

spiritual oppression. It seeks to establish a way of earthly living that sustains connection to God, His nature, His order and creation.

The traditional religion of Africa according to Mbiti precedes the P.A.O.C.C.'s outlook of a church. Within Mbiti's analysis of African religion there is no single formal building or physical structure in which the label of church can be placed. But it is a way of life, culture and belief in which a people practice within this mundane existence. Traditional African religion had and has established systems of living which preserve and develop the divinity and awareness of God within the recently arrived spirit (embryo, newborn) and the seeker throughout their life and practices that follow the passing of that spirit into another form (death). The P.A.O.C.C. is a community of God's people with an agreement to live harmoniously with God and His creation allowing them access to power that liberates them in mind, body and spirit.

The hierarchy within these forms of religious expression, the P.A.O.C.C. and Mbiti's analysis of African religion, serve similar functions within these communities. As the knowledge, participation and experience within the community's belief and cultural norms increase within the seeker there is more responsibility expected. Also, there is a generally accepted founder or leader of these communities who acts as the head of the body of believers. In many cases the present leaders are successors to the original founders and are generally persons of great knowledge, wisdom and spiritual power. These attributes are recognized within a potential leader by the ancestors, elders and other persons of authority within the community. Demonstrating such skills and disciplines promotes this member of the community in a place of authority.

These two religious expressions have similarities in all the categories examined but these similarities alone do not permit them to be considered the same or the P.A.O.C.C. to be considered totally Afrocentric. The concluding examination of some definitions of Afrocentricity will aid in discerning the P.A.O.C.C.'s African-centeredness.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Now that the similarities between theology exemplified within African traditional religion, according to John S. Mbiti, and that of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church have been illustrated, it can be concluded with some certainty that the P.A.O.C.C. is indeed Afrocentric. Yet, similarities in doctrines do not totally allow the P.A.O.C.C. to entitle itself "Pan-African." Within some of the aspects of these two religions one could easily find similarities with European religious expression. For example, like the P.A.O.C.C., European Christianity is based upon Judaism, and like the Mbiti's African Traditional religion, European Christianity believes in the existence of an All-powerful God.

To clarify the Afrocentricity of the P.A.O.C.C. a brief summation of the similarities between it and Mbiti's interpretation of African religion is as follows: First, revelation: both believe in the omnipresence of God and therefore comprehend the ability to come upon divine knowledge anytime and anywhere. In addition they both believe that divine revelation is enhanced within a communal, intra-dependent society and multiplied by group rituals and ceremonies. For example, the healing ceremonies of the Kung as compared to

the KUA Group Devotionals of the P.A.O.C.C. Second, God: both interpret God as omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscience. To augment this belief in transcendence, these theologies recognize the immanence of God manifested within the works of their ancestors and at the same time presently healing and liberating the faithful. Examples of this parallel relationship is seen within these groups' leaders: Khambageu of the Sonjo¹ and Jesus (revolutionary leader) of the P.A.O.C.C. Third, humanity: each one has similar interpretations such as, humankind's everlasting connection to God and the process of closer communion with God through the means of a covenant, communal society. The similarities within the tenet of revelation illustrate the unity in conception of humanity. Fourth, savior/messiah: as stated earlier within the section on Mbiti's interpretation of African theology, there is no formal title such as savior or messiah attached to any African leaders. Absent the title of savior/messiah, African theology has leaders and religious founders similar to the savior/messiah character of Jesus in the theology of the P.A.O.C.C. An example of this was seen in the above comparison of Khambageu of the Sonjo and Jesus of the Shrines of the Black Madonna. Last, church: both faiths believe that the church is more than a physical structure where meetings are held regularly, but rather a way of life, culture, and belief in which a group of people practice moment to moment. This is explained through these two faiths' view of God as transcendent and immanent at once. The hierarchies within these religions are based upon knowledge, participation and experience within the community's belief and cultural norms. The more a person excels at these attributes the greater the rank and responsibility expected. So essentially, it has been proven that the P.A.O.C.C. could fit under Mbiti's understanding of African

¹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 186-187.

religious expression, not only in doctrine but also in the fact that they are both practiced by an African people. Religion practiced by an African people is another similarity that does not necessarily make it African or Pan-African because there are many Africans and African Americans that embrace a highly European influenced Christianity. Still the question is, does the religious expression of the P.A.O.C.C. fully merit an African or Afrocentric designation?

To aid in solidifying the place of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church within the African world, a few quotes from Timothy J. Johnson may prove to be helpful at this point: "The initial task [and challenge] of the Afrocentric church is to usher in revival so that its congregants achieve the highest levels of abundant living which are inclusive of spiritual, mental, and social well-being [and] to redeem that which is stolen or damaged by the practices of Whites."² This statement is basically a paraphrase of the second stanza of the Black Christian Nationalist Creed which includes a mission, "to liberate Black people from powerlessness and from the oppression, brutality, and exploitation of the white gentile world."³ Also in his description of the Afrocentric church T. J. Johnson explains that, "a humanistic strategy necessarily incorporates the social realities of the group as a basis for action."⁴ The P.A.O.C.C. not only believe this but also "believe that both [their] survival and salvation depend upon [their] willingness to reject individualism."⁵ T. J. Johnson notes that the Afrocentric Church recognizes that "The corpus of the prophetic message of the Bible was outrage regarding social injustice. God

² Timothy J. Johnson, "The Black Church As An Afrocentric Institution," The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center 17, (Fall 1989-Spring 1990) : 142.

³ Albert B. Cleage, Jr., Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church, (Detroit, MI: Luxor Publishers of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, 1987), xiii.

⁴ Johnson, "The Black Church As An Afrocentric Institution," 143.

⁵ Cleage, Black Christian Nationalism, xiii.

hates sin!"⁶ This differs little if any from the P.A.O.C.C. claims that "the revolutionary Holy Spirit which will not long permit men to endure injustice nor to wear the shackles of bondage, in the rage of the powerless when they struggle to be free. . ."⁷ Another aspect is revival which "leads to recalling God's workings in the past as crucial to understanding the future."⁸ The P.A.O.C.C. firmly "believe that Jesus, the Black Messiah, was a revolutionary leader, sent by God to rebuild the Black nation Israel. . ."⁹ This statement shows a strong understanding of God's workings in the past. Finally, "The complementarity between immanence and transcendence in the Afrocentric Church makes possible a level of psychosocial growth and psychological wholeness which furthers positive development and goals of the African American community."¹⁰ This viewpoint is evident when seekers within the P.A.O.C.C. say ". . . I commit my life to the liberation struggle of Black people and accept the values, ethics, morals and program of the Black Nation. . ."¹¹

The additional, brief information from Timothy J. Johnson gives a glimpse of what can be considered an Afrocentric church. Also, it has been briefly illustrated how the P.A.O.C.C. can fit within some of his traits of what is titled an Afrocentric church. Therefore, it can be concluded with some certainty that T. J. Johnson's Afrocentric church would encompass the Shrines of the Black Madonna. This condensed comparison and conclusion can hardly stand alone without substantial, additional evidence and references, but it can be used in

⁶ Johnson, "The Black Church As An Afrocentric Institution," 143.

⁷ Cleage, Black Christian Nationalism, xiii.

⁸ Johnson, "The Black Church As An Afrocentric Institution," 144.

⁹ Cleage, Black Christian Nationalism, xiii.

¹⁰ Johnson, "The Black Church As An Afrocentric Institution," 145.

¹¹ Cleage, Black Christian Nationalism, xiii.

future studies along with other definitions of Afrocentric or Black theology. According to James H. Cone, Gayraud S. Wilmore and other scholars and theologians, Black theology is not just "white" theology practiced by Blacks, , but rather a faith that originated from the desperate needs of the raped, abused and mutilated culture of African captives of the Americas in order to acknowledge their selves as God's people.¹² There are a number of definitions of what Black/Afrocentric theology is and is not, but this is only a system of categorization for easy recognition. More important is whether these theologies practiced by Africans are practical in materializing an abundant, just, liberating and experiential life in the present time and situation while at the same juncture processing the seeker toward reunifying with the Creator. Demonstrated through the aspects of Mbiti's African religion and compared to the theology of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, is a branch in the tree of Afrocentric religious expression within Atlanta and the U.S.A. which can and should be investigated for their benefits and detriments to the faithful.

¹² James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979). For further details on Black Theology definitions and origins.

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